

Domestic Violence

Fact Sheet

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence behavior involves gaining and maintaining power and control in an intimate relationship. It can be physical, sexual, psychological, economic, verbal or spiritual.

Who are the victims?

Women in heterosexual relationships make up the majority of persons experiencing domestic violence, but it can occur in any type of relationship — married, separated, divorced, dating, heterosexual, gay or lesbian. It involves people of all races, ethnicities, socio-economic classes, religions and ages, and spills into our schools and our places of work.

Why don't victims leave?

There are many barriers to leaving an abusive relationship. Fear is often a primary reason, since the risk of homicide increases dramatically when a victim leaves. Love is also a factor. Most women do not want to end the relationship — they just want the violence to stop. Economics present a huge obstacle — if a victim has no access to money, a choice to move out may be a choice to live in poverty and homelessness. This may be an especially difficult choice if there are children, because batterers often threaten to take custody if their partner leaves. The victim may be so isolated from family, friends and community that she feels she has no support. Societal, cultural and religious pressures might also all prevent her from leaving. And if she is an immigrant, she might fear deportation.

Who are the batterers?

Batterers can be anyone. While women may sometimes be the batterers in heterosexual or lesbian relationships, the majority of batterers are men. They are of all races, ethnicities, culture, socio-economic class, age, religion or sexual orientation. They may have rigid beliefs about gender roles. And, they may also have learned abusive tactics from adult role models in their youth.

Statistics

United States

According to a 1999 study by the Commonwealth Fund, in Washington D.C., one in three women experience physical domestic violence by a spouse or boyfriend during their lifetime.

Washington State

Nearly one in two women insured by Group Health Cooperative in our state report having experienced intimate partner violence at some time in their lives.

King County

In 2003, nearly 12,000 domestic violence offenses were reported to authorities in King County. It's estimated that only one in seven domestic violence crimes is ever reported. Domestic violence is one of the main causes of homelessness for women and children — about 15,000 requests for domestic violence emergency shelter in King County were turned away in 2005.

(Over)

How are children affected?

Children witnessing violence in the home might have emotional responses similar to children who have been physically and emotionally abused. Children who witness domestic violence can grow up to be batterers or victims, although supportive adult family members and friends can help prevent these adverse effects and stop the cycle of violence.

How can I make a difference?

Domestic violence is a community issue. Each of us needs to commit to zero tolerance of abuse and violence when we hear and see it. For ideas on how to take action against domestic violence, visit the King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence's web site, www.kccadv.org.

Statistics on Children

An estimated 8.8 million children in the United States witness domestic violence in the home each year, according to a 1997 National Institute of Justice report. Other studies have found that child abuse occurs in up to 70 percent of families that experience domestic violence.